

Helping Children Reach a Healthy Weight

Proven Tips for Parents



THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT
of HEALTH and MENTAL HYGIENE

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner

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Are you worried about your child's weight or struggling with your own?

You are not alone!

In the past 10 years, obesity levels have **doubled** in the United States. More than half of adult New Yorkers are overweight or obese, and nearly half of all New York City elementary schoolchildren are not at a healthy weight. Obesity can begin very early in life. In fact, in New York City, 1 in 5 kindergarten children is obese.

Being overweight is not about looks. Many serious health problems are related to being overweight or obese in childhood, such as asthma, depression, diabetes, and heart disease.

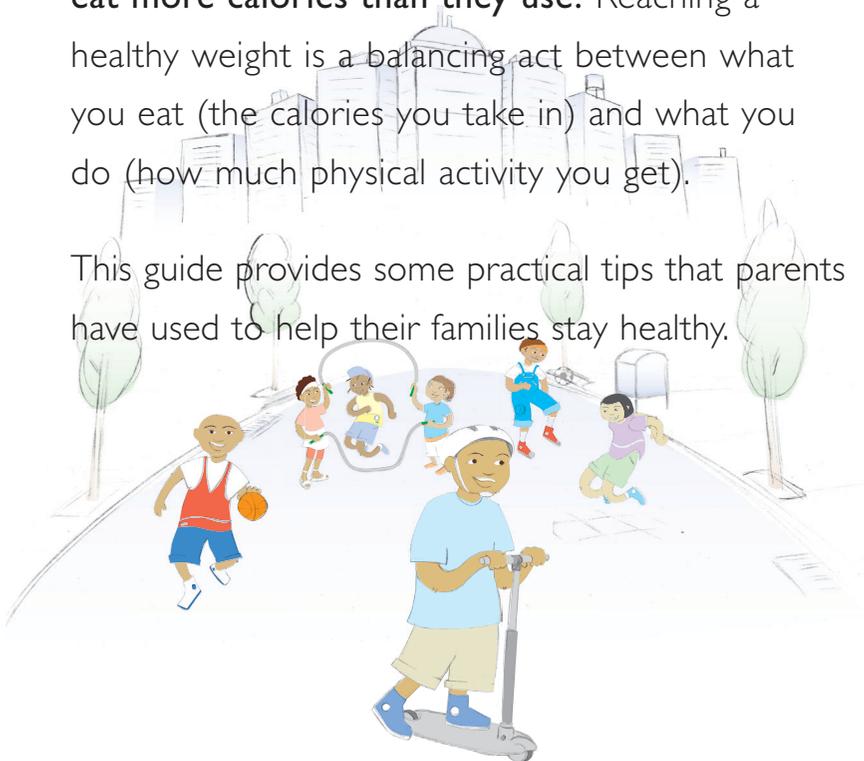
Parents and families can do a lot to help children reach a healthy weight. Even a small change in weight reduces the risk of health problems.

First, talk to your health care provider to find out what is a healthy weight range for you and your children.

Second, set a good example. As most parents know, kids are more likely to do what you **do** than what you **say to do**!

Keep in mind one simple idea that applies to children and adults alike: **overweight occurs when people eat more calories than they use**. Reaching a healthy weight is a balancing act between what you eat (the calories you take in) and what you do (how much physical activity you get).

This guide provides some practical tips that parents have used to help their families stay healthy.



Get Moving!

Physical activity improves your health even if you do not lose weight. Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (such as a brisk walk) on all or most days. Children and adolescents should be physically active for at least 60 minutes every day. It is okay to get this activity over the course of the day (for example, in several shorter periods of 10 to 15 minutes each).

Examples of Moderate Activities



- Walking briskly
- Walking downstairs
- Biking
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Gardening
- Housework

Examples of Vigorous Activities



- Jogging
- Walking upstairs
- Biking up a hill
- Aerobics
- Jumping rope
- Sports (such as soccer and basketball)

Choose indoor and outdoor activities that you and your children enjoy so they become part of your daily routine. Jump rope, play basketball or handball, take a walk, or play tag. When you are inside, take the stairs, play hide-and-seek or Twister; turn on your favorite music and dance together. You can burn calories and have fun, too.

Walk more. Try getting off the subway or bus a stop early and walking the rest of the way. Walk your children to school. Try starting a “walking school bus” in your neighborhood, where parents take turns walking a group of kids. Walking 10 extra minutes burns about 50 calories or up to 5 pounds a year!

Limit use of TV and video games to no more than 1 hour a day. Have fun in other ways: dance to your favorite music; walk the dog; take a class in martial arts; find activities at a nearby park or recreation center.



Eat Healthy!

Here is a list of common problems and how to solve them.

 If You or Your Children...	 Instead You Can...
 Eat too much	 Eat smaller amounts – bigger is not better. Check serving sizes on packages. Often a package contains several servings so that means extra calories if you eat the whole thing!
 Drink soda and other drinks with sugar	 Drink water or try diet drinks, seltzer, or low-fat milk.
 Eat too few fruits and vegetables	 Serve a fruit and a vegetable at each meal. When you shop let your children choose some fruits and vegetables they like. Fresh fruits and vegetables are best, but frozen are okay, too. Fruits and vegetables also make great snacks!
 Eat fast food	 Avoid large and “super-size” portions. Choose healthier items on the menu (such as salads).
 Eat out a lot	 Prepare more meals at home. Cook with your children. If you do eat out, share an order with your children. If you are served a large portion, set half aside to take home.



✘ If You or Your Children...

✔ Instead You Can...

✘ Eat unhealthy snacks (such as chips, candy, and cookies)

✔ **Snack on healthier foods and eat less junk food and sweets.**

Try pretzels, low-fat popcorn, mini carrots, celery sticks, grapes, apple slices, strawberries, dried fruit, or low-fat frozen yogurt.

✘ Eat high-fat dairy products (such as whole milk and ice cream)

✔ **Switch to low-fat or non-fat milk, yogurt, cheese, and frozen yogurt.**

✘ Eat red meat often

✔ **Try fish, chicken, or turkey.**

Broil, grill, or steam meat and fish instead of frying.

✘ Skip breakfast

✔ **Plan to eat a healthy breakfast every day.**

Try cereal with strawberries and low-fat milk, oatmeal with raisins and brown sugar, whole-wheat toast with peanut butter and a banana, egg white omelets with veggies and low-fat cheese, or yogurt with blueberries and low-fat granola.

✘ Think your kids will not eat healthy foods

✔ **Keep trying!** Serve fruits and vegetables often, involve your children in preparing them, and serve as a role model by eating them yourself. Children will eventually eat them!

8 Habits of Healthy Kids

1. Spend at least 1 hour a day being physically active.
2. Limit use of TV and video games to no more than 1 hour a day.
3. Eat smaller amounts. Bigger is not always better!
4. Drink water instead of soda.
5. Eat a total of 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
6. Eat less fast food (no more than once a week).
7. Snack on healthy foods and eat less junk food and sweets.
8. Drink or eat 3 low-fat dairy foods a day.

“The 8 Habits of Healthy Kids” adapted and printed with permission from the Strang Cancer Prevention Center’s “Healthy Children Healthy Futures” program.